

Devotional Studies No. 14

The Christian Faith

The Christian faith confronts everyone with the question: why Christ? The Christian faith is simply “faith” in Jesus the Christ. Unfortunately, the Christian church has focused more on biblical understanding of doctrine than it has upon faith in Jesus Christ. If the church had focused more on the confession of faith, which alone is contained in the New Testament, the Christian community could have avoided many pitfalls, which snares have proliferated into numerous divisions within the body of Christ. Biblical faith focuses more upon trust and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. When one puts his or her trust in the Lord, this trust puts one in fellowship with Him. This kind of trust is essentially what faith means in the New Testament writings—fellowship with the living Lord.

Faith in Christ is the starting point of one’s walk with God, not grasp of abstract truth concerning doctrinal issues that many Christians are divided over. The faith that justifies is the faith that puts its trust in “the truth,” namely Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus responded to a question posed by Thomas: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (**John 14:6**). Many believers identify their understanding of the Scriptures as the “truth” that the Bible speaks of. For example, one of the most quoted Scriptures by many believers, especially those within the Churches of Christ, focuses upon **John 8:31-32**: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” When one fails to read the context of **John 8:31-32**, one can manipulate this passage to give validity to one’s sectarian attitude toward those who do not see eye-to-eye with some narrow interpretation of Scripture foisted by himself, or some exclusive band of believers, which odd interpretation is founded upon some particular Scripture taken out of context.

The question that confronts every reader is: what is the “teaching” that Jesus alludes to? Earlier in this Chapter, the religious leaders challenged the testimony of Jesus about Himself as not valid (**8:13**). Jesus countered their negative remarks by calling attention to His testimony as defensible (**8:14**); He asserted: “I know where I came from and where I am going” (**8:14b**). John said that Jesus “spoke these words while teaching in the temple area” (**8:20**). Again, Jesus says, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (**8:23**). Once more, Jesus informs them: “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be” (**8:24**). Just before He comments about holding to His teaching (**8:31**), He repeats, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be” (**8:28**). Returning once more to Jesus’ statement about “the truth” setting one free, one discovers that the truth is Jesus, not the convoluted arguments about a so-called

worship service with five prescribed rituals performed on Sunday morning. Jesus' testimony about His preexistence and His mission for redemption should settle the question: **"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36).**

Jesus is Himself the content of faith and ultimate truth, which statement is a radical departure from the ordinary conception of truth. The focus today, at least among many Christians, is not Jesus, but rather a correct understanding of the tradition of the local body of believers. This short essay seeks to focus, or concentrate, upon Jesus as the object of one's faith. John records another informative statement about Jesus: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). One can say that with the coming of Jesus, grace and truth came into its full form, or bloom. In other words, not only are grace and truth manifest in Jesus, but also it is in Him that grace and truth comes to its full realization. Truth is something that happens, which God does. It is only in Him that God the Father can be known. It is only in Him that one can be reconciled unto God the Father. The message of the Gospel is about the Incarnation of the Son who is "truth." With the coming of Jesus, one is confronted with the only redemptive fact. It is in Him and Him alone that one comes fact-to-face with the Divine realization of the eternal purpose of God for lost humanity. Jesus' preaching began with a call to repentance and the announcement of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is revealed and grounded in the Incarnate Son.

In the Incarnation, God reveals Himself as the God who approaches humanity. Christians need to recapture the coming of Jesus as an act of God. If one wishes to know God, one must come to know the One who reconciles men and women to God. The Gospels and the Epistles set forth the biblical message of redemption by disclosing the following: Christ coming down from above, God sending His Son, Christ self-giving of Himself for reconciliation with God, Christ's taking upon Himself human flesh, His going to the Cross to set men and women free from condemnation, and so on. The message of the Gospel is about God revealing Himself in His Son and reconciling lost humanity unto Himself in and through His Son Jesus. This One who is called Jesus has also a functional name—the Messiah. For one to believe in Him is to bow to His Sovereign Will in order to please Him. It is in Him, that God reveals the "mystery" of redemption that had been kept secret even before God spoke this universe into existence. Jesus the Christ is God's act of atonement for the sins of humanity. One must never forget that even in the sufferings of Christ upon Calvary, God is the One who is active and giving. God is the initiator.

One cannot grasp the significance of Christ apart from His suffering upon the Cross. It is through this event that God establishes fellowship with men and women. The entire Bible must be read with reference to this basic theme of redemption. The death of Christ is unique; it happened once for all. Just a brief reflection upon the nature of fellowship with God reveals that God requires a response on the part of sinful humanity—responding faith. In repentance, which God calls for in one's response to Jesus, there is a surrender of one's sinful will that is estranged from God. Remember, the Gospel of Jesus Christ begins with repentance (Matthew 4:17). God's grace becomes judgment when one refuses to repent. Listen to Jesus as he informs Nicodemus: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,^f that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).** Jesus further remarks: **"Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one**

and only Son” (3:18). The righteousness of God, according to Paul, is revealed without the assistance of the Law (**Romans 3:21**). The righteousness from God can only be obtained through faith in Jesus the Christ (**1:17**).

With repentance and baptism, one should experience a change of disposition as one surrenders his or her life to Jesus. Paul writes about this change to the Romans: “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (**6:3-4**). The old person dies, that is to say, the old person is annihilated. Every person who is baptized enters into His death. God draws the baptized person into the Death of His Son. God draws each individual into His Death. Again, one witnesses God’s grace; salvation is not the work of men and women. God wants a “yes” from men and women in their response to Jesus as Lord, but, at the same time, He wants a “no” to the ways of the world. Repentance is the death of the one who has deserted God. What does faith in Christ mean to you? For the believer, it means trust in Jesus for salvation; it means to live for the Lord and to be His instrument and to be His servant. Why Christ?

^fOr *his only begotten Son*